

COOPERATIVE CAMPING

Whitney and Walters

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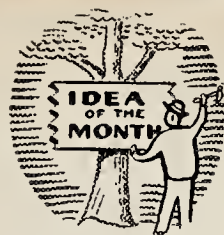
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COOPERATIVE CAMPING

We hear a good deal about integration of special groups these days, but this is a brand new type! An imaginative solution for limited facilities and budgets. A cooperative project for social and recreation agencies. A delightful and meaningful experience for two diverse groups—the blind and the older adults—of mixed ages. Results? So satisfactory that the project will be repeated, on a larger scale, this summer.

Earle D. Whitney and George T. Walters

"This was the most wonderful week of my life!"

"I wish we'd all catch the measles or something and be quarantined so we could stay longer."

"I'll be back next year if I have to come in a wheelchair."

These remarks are typical of those made as golden-agers and blind campers concluded a six-day stay at Camp Indian Springs in Butler, Pennsylvania. The first was spoken by a blind girl who has missed out on much of the fun normal teen-agers take for granted; the second by a golden-ager, on her first vacation away from family and responsibility in years; the third by a man, partially blind and afflicted with muscular sclerosis.

How did these two seemingly incongruous groups get together? Early last year, at a meeting of our local blind association, the subject of camping for the blind was brought up. The big problem was, as usual, finances—and the limited number of blind people interested in camp life. For some time, the Butler Recreation Department had been toying with the idea of a week at camp for members of our golden-age group; but we, too, were plagued with financial difficulties. So, why not pool our resources and work out a cooperative camp?

The final result far surpassed our hopes. Forty campers had the week of their lives — twenty-four golden-agers,

sixteen blind people. We feel that neither group by itself could have been so successful — but, cooperatively, it's a combination hard to beat. The golden-agers helped the blind, and felt wonderful because they were needed; and the blind people, some for the first time in their lives, were enjoying normal pursuits of fun. Lasting friendships were formed between the elderly and the blind who found that older people can be useful and active. Most important of all, they had fun in a mixed group of varying ages. They talked, played, ate, relaxed, and worshipped together and found that, despite all handicaps, they could enjoy it. Two groups of people left for camp—one group returned.

To those of you who have taken groups camping for years, these facts may be far from remarkable. It was a *first* here in Butler; but we don't intend it to be the last of such camping ventures. This is mainly written for those cities who have not yet tried camping activities for such groups, and to encourage more of such relaxation and recreation. If we can do it, so can you!

Problems and Some Solutions

Camp Site. This should be comparatively level, with easy access to all facilities. We were able to rent a church camp, complete with dormitories, a fine kitchen, and a pool. Surprisingly, the pool provided the most popular activity at camp. Some of the golden-agers hadn't been swimming for years; some of the blind had never been in the water. Only a few of the golden-agers had brought bathing suits, but after the first day, as enthusiasm for swimming grew,

bathing suits were shared and any type sports clothes that could be improvised for such were used. A guard rope warned about depth; and a small radio on the diving board also helped in the orientation of the blind.

Rates. Since many golden-agers and blind persons have limited incomes, it is most important to arrive at a rate well within everyone's budget. By careful planning and the use of government surplus foods, we were able to break even by charging only \$15 per person for the six-day period. Every economic shortcut possible was used; for example, in our golden-age group one couple worked on the staff—the wife was an accredited practical nurse, the husband acted as chief dishwasher. They enjoyed a week of camp privileges, and we were spared the necessity of hiring extra help.

Staff. An experienced camp director is vital to the success of the whole program, preferably one who understands the problems of the blind. A good camp cook is also most important. Our meals were all served family style, with seconds if desired. In addition, staff included: two assistant cooks, three dishwashers, one lifeguard, one nurse. Our camp director and her assistant were both employees of the Butler Blind Association and so their services to the camp were considered as part of their regular duties. This helps explain how our operating costs were so low.

Program. A representative from each dormitory helped to plan the daily program, thus assuring activities of interest to all. No one was compelled to

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join any group; if he preferred to sit under a tree, he did. The day's program started at 7:30 A.M. and ended at 10:30 P.M. There was swimming, music, dancing, games, nature hikes and studies, group discussions on such topics as retirement and social security, arts and crafts, inter-faith devotions.

One of the blind campers, a young minister, was invaluable in leading morning and evening interdenomina-

tional devotionals and in general being an outstanding personality. A local photographer furnished four cameras and a dozen rolls of film, and the golden-agers took turns being "official" camp photographer. The best photograph snapped on the camp grounds was taken by a totally blind camper. What more can be said to indicate the success of this unique camping venture than that it turned out to be not only

an experiment in group living, but also a happy holiday for everyone concerned?

Without splendid community cooperation the camp could never have been a success. The local newspaper and two radio stations covered the story completely: the Butler Lion's Club provided a bus to transport the campers; interested citizens made donations; and everybody pitched in to help. ■

Nature Activities in Camping

A plea for better leadership.

Janet Nickelsburg

I HAVE HAD the opportunity to visit and work in a great many children's camps, and the more I see of the sort of programs planned for children in the field of nature study, the more I realize the need for the enlightenment of leaders as to the nature possibilities a camp site offers.

At one camp in the high mountains, where all the beauty of tall trees, all the geology of mountain structure, and all the wild life of mountain streams and virgin brush lay about, the land was being cleared, the shrubs torn away to expose bare ground so that a badminton court could be constructed. The rough, raw flat of the hilltop cried aloud in its nakedness, and an object lesson was being created in how to start destructive erosion.

At such a camp there are infinite possibilities for the explorer in all fields of nature. How much better to have cleared a pathway, and a very narrow one, for a nature trail—where each plant as it was pushed aside would reveal its own history, its own adaptations to its environment, and the multitude of small creatures which use it as their habitat!

The teaching of nature study should concern itself, to my thinking, with the larger picture, not with the analysis of its parts. We are all too prone to think that we have taught the children about nature when they are able to identify twenty trees or wild flowers or rocks. When we have succeeded in doing this, this alone is what they know. They know nothing of the relationships of one thing to another, the conditions which enable those things to live where they are, nothing of the life cycles of living things. We take our children into the outdoors and we teach them to destroy. They pick wild flowers, they kill butterflies and other insects, and they take home a more or less accurate collection to show their

parents. But, the average child has small interest afterwards in this collection.

To find a flower and to watch it develop on the stem, to see it go from bud to seed, to watch it day by day, to observe it carefully enough so as to be able to sketch it in every phase of its development, that is the only manner in which children's collections should be made. Such living experiences will never be allowed to perish as collections of dead objects inevitably do.

At another camp the children brought some frogs from the creek. We kept them for a while, but warm weather and unsuitable conditions inevitably took their toll, and before we had a chance to return them to their natural environment we found that one had died. We began to ask ourselves why? What environment did a frog really need and why had it not eaten what we gave it? We decided then, that we would like to find out what a frog really does eat, and so, since the frog was dead, we thought we might learn something from our poor little victim. We dissected it, and the contents of the stomach revealed that larvae, which we had found in such abundance adhering to rocks in the stream, made up a large part of the diet—and perhaps that was why our offerings of dead mosquitoes and beetles had gone untasted. This, then, had become a lesson in ecology.

Our children were being taught to observe, not to capture small animals solely for playthings. The place for a frog to live is at the brookside, and our children should be encouraged to build an enclosure by that brookside to satisfy their sense of ownership and to allow further observation.

No man should ever really believe that he owns a living thing, for ownership too often means the power to destroy at will. The welfare of living creatures which we have as pets or domestic animals is—like that of our children—a responsibility, not alone because their loss would mean money out of pocket, but because of the inherent rights of any animal.

To understand that the countryside was not made for his enjoyment only, to perceive how each thing that makes up the countryside fits together like a jigsaw puzzle, that each is one part of a fascinating whole—that is the lesson man must learn, not only in the country, but wherever living, growing things can take hold and flourish.

To teach our children this sort of nature study is not only a challenge but an obligation of all those whose field of recreation touches on the child's relationship to the world that lies about him. ■

MRS. NICKELSBURG has had many years of experience in nature-study and has written and directed radio and TV programs dealing with this field.

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